2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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boys and young men, so long as they were in the village. Ngoni men insisted that their children should be correctly trained, and they were contemptuous of Cewa and other tribal groups who left it 'all to the women'. The handing on of correct behaviour by the mother-in-law to her daughter-in-law was, they considered, essential, and one of the reasons why young men in the central kingdom liked to 'marry up' was that they could count on the careful grounding in all the canons of behaviour which their wives had received.

CHAPTER V

AGE SETS

THE Ngoni brought with them to Nyasaland an age-set system akin to that among the South-eastern Bantu, which was an important element in their social structure. In pre-European days the division into cattle-herders or pre-warriors, warriors, and post-warriors or senior men, regulated the tasks and responsibilities of boys and men in other spheres besides those of warfare. At the beginning of this section, when reviewing age sets as one of the constituent forms of Ngoni social organization, I said that some features of an age-set system had persisted. In comparison with age-grouping in the other Nyasaland tribes it was distinctively Ngoni in form; it influenced behaviour patterns in inter-group and intra-group relations; and in it were recognized certain responsibilities and activities belonging to the different groups based on age.

Among the distinctively Ngoni elements in the age-set system were the private nature of the puberty ritual and the absence of initiation schools; the organization of boys' life in the *laweni*; the strong ties between age mates up to marriage; the selective principle in designating senior men and women as *madoda* and *manina*; and a different kind of selective principle in the formation of friendship pacts between individuals of the same age. In observing the role of age sets in Ngoni village society, the two main groups which were constantly in evidence as groups were the older boys and girls and the senior men and women. These groups not only carried out activities together, but also showed evidence of the strength of the internal ties linking members of an age set. There were, however, no sharp edges to these groups, either in terms of actual age or physiological development or of exclusive membership. The following list of terms applied to age sets in the two main Ngoni areas shows primarily the difference in designation between males and females according to broad age grouping, but it illustrates also the fact that the terminology applied to the age sets did not always coincide

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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boys took more interest and more part in adult occupations and affairs, the emergence of leadership among Ngoni boys of high-ranking families was watched by their elders and recognized by their age mates. This was the formative period when a boy's capacity to succeed his father in a position of authority was carefully observed and judged. The Ngoni had ways of passing over a man who was a physical weakling, a coward in face of danger, a sadistic bully to weaker men, a pursuer of women and a breaker-up of marriages. The *madoda* in a Ngoni village, who appeared to let the boys in the *laweni* manage their own affairs without interfering, had nevertheless a shrewd idea of who was making good and who was proving disappointing. Their comments, showing continued observation over a long period, were often expressed when two or three friends and age mates from the *laweni* decided to go off to the south to work together. The *madoda* would then say: 'We hope they will come back soon and not be "lost". So and so is like his father and he will help us here in the village'; or they might comment: 'Good riddance, they were always hanging round the girls—worthless ones, indeed' (*wa chabe ndithu*).

It has already been pointed out that there was no circumcision school nor public initiation rite among the Ngoni. At puberty the ritual observed was a private and personal affair. On a boy's first nocturnal emission his age mates informed an older boy in the *laweni*, who told him to go at once before it was light and bathe in the river, and to do so each morning after an emission. This use of cold water was believed to give a boy strength and virility. The boy was also instructed by the older boys in the *laweni* on how to behave to his equals and his elders and to women. This stage was called *ukuchayiwa nga' manzi*, 'to be beaten with water', and was not reported to the older people. When the older people noticed that the boy's voice was breaking, his father inquired whether he had passed puberty and, on being assured of this, he found a man who knew the *uludengele* medicine. The father killed a goat, and the medicine man took some of the unchewed cud from the goat's stomach, mixed it with the bitter *uludengele* root and put it on a pan over a fire. This took place near the gate of the kraal or near the parents' hut, with the father and the father's male relatives standing by. When the mixture boiled, the boy was told to dip the tips of his fingers in the pan one after the other and lick each one quickly. At the same time he kept jumping over the fire and striking his elbows against his sides. The Ngoni believed that this medicine gave boys physical strength and stamina and they administered it to their servants' sons as well. It was still practised in the 1930's among Ngoni who were educated and partly westernized.

While the organization of the *laweni* catered for all boys from their second teeth till their marriage, including boys from the age sets called *abantwana* and *amajaha*, the organization of girls' life followed a

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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different pattern. They also went to sleep with a grandmother or some other older member of the family when they were old enough to be excluded from their mother's hut at night, and they shared with their small brothers the grandmother's care and her story-telling round the fire in the evenings. During the day the girls continued as part of their mother's household group, eating with her and the younger children. As little girls they were taught to sit down carefully and to smooth down the cloth which they wore round their waists. They were trained to speak correctly and to know the right forms of address, to greet strangers politely, to avoid touching their father's mats or bed, to eat tidily and with restraint. The emphasis was on exclusiveness for these high-born Ngoni girls, lest, as a result of mixing too freely with everyone, they should forget the teaching given and the behaviour which was expected of them. In contrast to their brothers' rigorous training in the *laweni*, Ngoni girls, as they showed signs of approaching puberty, were guarded and looked after and instructed further in correct behaviour.

When a girl found that she was menstruating for the first time, she told one of her age mates and sent her to tell her *gogo*.[1] The *gogo* told her to stay in the hut during the period and showed her how to wear a cloth between her legs, which she had henceforth to wear always whether menstruating or not. She was told to sleep from now on in a different part of the hut from the smaller children and never to bathe with younger girls. At the end of her first period the girl was escorted to the women's bathing-place by her father's sisters and other female members of her father's family. She was made to wash in the stream and squat in the cold water while doing so. I saw more than one child trying to control her shivering while her relatives watched to see if she would be strong and brave, or weak and cowardly. When she was in the water she was made to face south-east—the quarter which the Ngoni called *kwathu* (our home). After this ceremony the girl's father and mother were informed, and her father informed the head of his *banja* and the head of the village. The news was greeted with rejoicing and made generally public.

From about the age of ten or eleven, the Ngoni girl belonged to an age set distinguished by a separate name. She was no longer included in the group of children, as were her brothers of the same age, but was marked out by belonging to the age set called *inkakazana* or *mabuthu*. After her first menstruation she belonged to the age set called *izintombi* or *anamwali*. From this stage, Ngoni girls were under the close supervision of the older women. The association of a *gogo* or older woman with each house in a Ngoni village meant that the girls of the house were under her special care, particularly after they had passed puberty. There

[1] *gogo* in this context is used for grandmother or for the elderly woman to whose care the girl was assigned.

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were clearly defined aims in this care of girls after puberty, including instruction in personal hygiene and in pre-marital sexual relations. A girl's father's sisters and her own mother wanted to be able to say, when marriage negotiations began: *Ngombe zake zidzala*, 'her cattle are full', which was the comment made when girls were examined periodically to see if they were still virgin. To achieve this they constantly said to her: '*Mudzinunge, mudziletse*', 'take care of yourself, control yourself'; and the *gogo* explained to the girl how she could protect herself. In one area where I lived, the chief's daughter was examined every week, with her *isidandani* or companions, and the girls who helped in the big house were examined every month. The strict behaviour required of Ngoni girls of good family was expected also of those of the same age who were members of the same household, either appointed to be with them as companions or as servants in the big house.

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Looking forward to marriage involved not only preservation of her virginity. An Ngoni girl going to a strange village had to know how to perform women's work in the home, how to do it herself as well as how to direct others, and she had to be carefully trained in that meticulous and exclusive social behaviour required of Ngoni women of good family. She might be going to marry a man who intended to 'marry up', in which case she might be thought in one sense to be 'marrying below her station'. Yet her personal position as a member of her father's clan and family could not be altered by her marriage, and she was well aware that she was conferring something on the man and on the family she married into.

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While the boys were learning their roles in later life in the democratic atmosphere of the *laweni* and of the boys' pursuits in the village, the girls in the later stage of their training after puberty were treated more individually, and were not left to find their level in a group of their age mates. The adult women took an active part in telling them how to behave, how to dress and how to cook. The girls of high-ranking families sometimes pounded maize with their age mates, singing as they did so, but more for fun than because their food depended on it. They learned to dress their hair and put on clothes, and to walk and dance in company with other girls, but always with the critical eye of their *gogo* upon them. Their lower-ranking companions could make mistakes and be careless, and walk and dance in an exaggerated fashion. Ngoni girls might never pass certain bounds of decorum, and the standard expected of them was high and exacting. I have heard *manina* of leading clans scold young girls many times for careless behaviour and badly done work.

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In this training, as throughout that of the boys, there was a deliberate preparation for leadership. A girl's character and ability were being watched and, while an awareness of her personal dignity and position was being fostered, it was accompanied by requirements of obedience

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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and docility, especially to older women. This last was intended to stand her in good stead when she went to be married in a strange village and would be expected to show subservience to her mother-in-law. At the same time, since the girl belonged to a high-ranking clan, she knew, and so did those who were training her, that she would eventually have to exercise authority and teach others what to do and show them how to do it. She would also be expected to have a mind of her own and to speak out on occasions to her husband and, when she grew older, to rebuke women in her house or in her service if they did anything amiss.

In pre-European days, between the private puberty ritual and her marriage, the Ngoni girl went through another ceremony, the *umsindo*. This was a pre-marriage rite, and was in many instances followed almost immediately by marriage. It was held for girls of high-ranking families, though their companions from their own and other villages shared in the ritual. The ceremony was abandoned after the missionaries came, but many of the songs and the dances were well-known to the leading Ngoni women. I saw many *umsindo* dances in the northern and central kingdoms and collected a number of the songs which were still in use, some sung to solo instruments, such as the *igubu*, and others sung at funerals or at tribal gatherings. Those *umsindo* songs which referred to sexual intercourse and used expressions which were considered obscene, had been sung only at the ceremony itself. The Ngoni made a practice of referring to genital organs and to sexual intercourse in veiled language. As soon as the meaning of the terms became obvious, they were disguised by other allusive terms. The degree of obscenity in the actual words of songs was therefore very difficult to establish, but Ngoni informants were always clear about which could be sung in public and which only on occasions of licence or strictly in private.

The *umsindo* ceremony as a preliminary to marriage fulfilled certain functions. It was a public declaration that the girl for whom it was held had been examined and found to be a virgin, for it was not held for anyone who had been deflowered in earlier love affairs. It emphasized the social rank and the wealth of the girl's father, for only rich and important men could afford to hold *umsindo* for their daughters. It had a strong element of a *rite de passage* in it, for the girls were secluded in a hut during most of the ceremony, they fasted, they were given instruction by older women, and they were finally 'brought out' of the hut and adorned with parts of the beasts slaughtered, and with beads given as presents by friends and relatives. Perhaps the chief significance of the *umsindo* was the fact that it was a ceremony held for the girl in her father's village. It was an assertion of her membership in her own family and village circle, and of her father's status and of his regard for her. There is no doubt that the Ngoni women of high rank had a keen sense of their own importance and position; the *umsindo* ceremony

emphasized this, and was a reminder of their careful bringing up in their father's village surrounded by their attendant girls and older women.

Many of the *umsindo* songs referred to well-known events in Ngoni history. Others were warnings against jealousy when living in a polygynous household. One of these, said to be a lament of the women about the difficulties of polygynous households, was very popular in the northern kingdom and was used by Ngoni ministers in the churches when speaking against polygamy, even though the actual words of the song seemed to be referring to a historical event.

The boys and girls went through one common ceremony about the age of seven, when their second teeth were coming. The local tribes practised various forms of scarification, including facial tribal markings. The Ngoni never did this in the past and said that they despised it. Their distinctive marking was the piercing of the ear lobes in order to insert a small piece of reed, or a stud, or some beads. Formerly, when captives were taken in war, or when a village was conquered and annexed, the local people, especially the y[illegible]r men, were forced to have their ears pierced as a condition of service in the regiments. After the Europeans came, the forcible ear-piercing was resisted by the local tribes, but among the Ngoni, especially those of trans-Zambesi clans, it continued to be practised, and I saw it being carried out in several villages. It was done in the dry cold-weather months, usually by one of the senior women of the children's family or house, and included all the children of about the same age who wanted to have their ears pierced. The woman pierced the lobe with a thorn, or a needle if she had one, and threaded some cotton through the hole. A day or so later they put in tiny bits of grass and replaced these with larger and larger bits until the hole was considered the right size.

After this ear-piercing ceremony, the boys' and girls' groups developed on their separate lines until their members became interested in each other as members of the opposite sex. Then, as I said at the beginning of the chapter, the groups of youths and girls were the two most prominent age groups in a village. They paid great attention to their clothes, washed with sweet-smelling leaves, used fats to anoint their hair, and the girls wore bead ornaments in their hair and on neck and wrists. Thus adorned, they spent their leisure time, especially in the cold weather after harvest, visiting other villages, usually in separate groups of youths and girls, except when they went as a team to dance *ngoma* in a neighbouring village.

In the social life of young people in Ngoni villages, the *ngoma* dance played an important part, especially in the northern kingdom. It took place after the harvest and was organized on a 'village team' basis. The boys practised their dance outside the cattle kraal in the evenings, and the girls did their dancing by themselves as a rule. But on the occasion

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
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at puberty and their subsequent implications for marriage and sexual life; the social recognition by the society of the significance of this change; and the rituals which marked this transition. Initiation rites, as a form of *rites de passage*, occur in many societies immediately after puberty. The majority of these initiation rites takes the form of a 'school', involving a period of seclusion in some remote locality away from normal social life, varying degrees of physical endurance tests, instruction in traditional hygiene and sex life and in correct behaviour to senior people, with an intense emphasis on submission to authority. At the end of the seclusion period, which varies in different societies from a few weeks to three or four months, there is generally feasting and other forms of rejoicing when the initiates return to their villages to resume normal life but with a new status.

The underlying aim in many initiation rites was to bring home to the individuals, and to the entire age-group which they represented, the dominant importance of fertility in the life of their society. This lesson among the Cewa, one of the ethnic groups living close to the Ngoni, was driven home by a second ritual which occurred at the first pregnancy of every married woman. In sociological and psychological terms the aims of the ritual in initiation schools were to strengthen the individual at a time of crisis in his life, to sanction his new status in society after the period of seclusion and instruction, and to assert the authority of society over the individual through the solemnity and rigour of the ritual. One purpose of these rituals which has not received much attention was to bring together separately boys and girls in homogeneous sex and age-groups for the last time before they broke up into separate heterogeneous relationships on marriage.

Ngoni puberty rituals

The Ngoni, unlike the ethnic groups by which they were surrounded, had no initiation schools either at or after puberty. In spite of their cultural emphasis on the importance

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
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of 'staying together', they did not make the occasion of physical maturity an opportunity for driving home the lesson. According to Ngoni tradition the forms of private ritual for girls and for boys had come with them from the south. At one point in their wanderings, said to be in Tanganyika before they settled in Nyasaland, they gave up the practice of circumcision, also brought from the south. This rite, according to tradition, had coincided with boys passing out from herding cattle and being called up into a regiment.

The question naturally arises why the Ngoni adhered to their private ritual at puberty, and never adopted any of the local forms of initation schools, and why they abandoned their only corporate ritual of this type: the circumcision school. Various reasons were given by the Ngoni elders for abandoning the circumcision ritual: that there were no more grass to be found of the sharp kind with which the foreskin was cut; that the school which lasted three to four months delayed for too long the intake of young men into the army; and that the young men of non-Ngoni families, compulsorily absorbed into the army, objected strongly to being circumcised.

After a short description of the private ritual for girls and boys, we will return to answer the question why the Ngoni held to these forms.

Girls' private ritual

When a Ngoni girl found she was menstruating for the first time, she stayed in the hut where she was sleeping and called her companion or her friend and told her what was taking place. Ngoni women declared that their girls were as a rule unprepared, and that the flow of blood was unexpected and alarming. Some Ngoni girls agreed that this was true. The majority said, 'We knew about this from our older sisters and companions, but we hid this knowledge from the elders.' The companion or friend found a senior helper in the grandmother's household, generally the one who had supervised the

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
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girl's former nurse girl and had continued to take an interest in the girl. This woman came to the hut, gave the girl a cloth to wear, told her to stay in the hut until the period was over, and instructed her companion to stay with her, bring her food, and look after her other needs. When the period was over, the companion told the senior helper who in the meantime had informed the girl's paternal grandmother, her father's sister (to whom a special message was sent to the village where she lived), and the girl's own mother. The information was always given in the phrase, 'This child has now matured.' The father's sister, who made a special visit for the purpose, came into the hut and told the girl to get up and follow her. A little procession formed, the father's sister leading, the girl immediately behind her, then the grandmother and other senior women of the father's house, the senior helper who had attended the girl, and finally the girl's mother. At the river the girl was made to take off her clothes and sit in shallow water, facing south-east, the ritual position adopted in all Ngoni crises of life and death. On the bank the women stood in silence and watched the girl splashing herself with water and trying to control her shivering, until she was allowed to come out and given clean clothes to put on.

Back at the grandmother's hut, the women sat on the veranda, the girl in front of them, legs tucked in sideways, head bent in a respectful attitude. The father's sister led off with some matter-of-fact instructions to the girl. At subsequent periods she would not be in seclusion but she would take every care to conceal her condition from everyone. She must always wear a cloth between her legs, whether menstruating or not, and she must now consider herself separated from the children's and the immature girls' groups. She would sleep only with mature girls in a senior helper's hut, and must wash in the river only with them, and never anywhere near young children or immature girls. Later on, not on this occasion, the senior helper who had assisted her and felt

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

88 [864] responsible for her, told her how to keep her legs together if she should sleep with a boy, and warned her against full intercourse and possible pregnancy. This warning was followed up with regular examination to see if the hymen was intact, carried out every two months or so by some senior woman of the girl's father's house.

When the simple ritual was over, the grandmother sent for the girl's father and told him what had taken place. He in turn told the male members of his house and the elders of the village. The news 'So and so's daughter is now mature' was received in the village with quiet rejoicing, and the father was congratulated as one who would in time receive cattle on his daughter's marriage.

88 182 In this ritual the seclusion, washing with cold water and facing south-east in the river were the only strictly ritual acts. Equally important in Ngoni thinking however was the reassertion, at a critical time, of the authority of the women of her father's house over the girl. The girl was also made aware of her new status by being forbidden to perform certain daily functions in the presence of children and younger girls. Later we shall see how the first stages of courtship followed this event.

Boys' private ritual

88 The boys' ritual consisted of two distinct parts. At his first nocturnal emission the boy told one of his age-mates or his friend, who went and told one of the older boys in the dormitory. This older boy told him to go to the river very early in the morning and 'wash strongly', splashing the water all over him, and to do this after each emission. This act, called 'being beaten with water', the Ngoni believed was essential to strengthen the body and assist to control sexual impulse. There was great secrecy observed about this stage, only the boy and his friend and the older boy knowing about it. If other boys said to him 'You have now matured', he denied it vehemently.

THE THRESHOLD OF ADULTHOOD (1)

When the boy's voice began to break, and his father or another older man noticed it, the second part of the ritual took place. The father's brother went to a senior man famed in the village as a herbalist and obtained from him several kinds of roots. These were ground and then cooked either in milk or in the cud from a goat's stomach, usually the latter, for the father liked it to be known that he killed a goat for his son. If the mixture was cooked in milk, a fowl was killed, and in either case the boy was given the meat to eat immediately after the mixture to take away the extremely bitter taste. The cooking took place on a small fire by the kraal gate in the presence of the male members of the father's house. The boy was told to dip the tips of his fingers in the mixture as it was bubbling in the pan and to lick them quickly. He was not expected to show that he found the mixture very bitter as well as hot to touch. At intervals the boy had to jump over the fire, hitting his elbows and knees with the palms of his hands. The more often he did this, the less often did he have to dip in the pan because the mixture soon dried up, but he had to continue dipping and licking till there was no liquid left. The senior men watched intently all through this performance because they believed the mixture not only helped physical growth and muscular strength but would prevent impotence. When this ritual was performed for the heir of a chief, it was followed by a war-dance in the cattle kraal and the boy had to take a second dose of medicine in the kraal surrounded by the warriors. In such a case a bull was killed instead of the customary goat, and the contents of its stomach used for mixing the medicine. The meat was eaten by the boy and his father's relatives.

As in the case of the girls, this boy's ritual was an occasion for asserting the authority of the father and his kin over the boy. For him there was however no separating off into another group after this maturing. He continued to live in the dormitory, herd cattle, and go to school as before.

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
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Cewa

The significance of Ngoni puberty ritual

We now come back to the question of why the Ngoni held to this private ritual for girls and boys at puberty. There were three main reasons. The first was that each Ngoni child belonged to his or her father's house. At this sign of physical maturity, significant for the boy or girl, and for the society, the elders of the house asserted anew their authority over them, performed a brief traditional ritual, and watched during the ritual for evidence of the Ngoni personality traits of courage and physical endurance which they expected to see in young adults. The second reason was that the change at puberty was regarded as marking only one of the stages in the development of growing boys and girls. It is true it had more significance for girls, in that it set the mature girls apart as a separate group. But it was not the prelude to immediate marriage, as the girls' initiation school was among the neighbouring Cewa people; nor was it in old days the prelude for the boys joining the army. The third reason was that the Ngoni did not regard fertility as the major dominant factor in the development of young women, as it undoubtedly was considered among the Cewa. They greatly disliked the ritual and the significance of the Cewa female initiation rites and forbade Ngoni women to have any part in them. Potency among men, on the other hand, was recognized as important both for the individual and for the social group, and impotence, particularly in leading men, was kept secret and hidden from outside knowledge as far as possible. If an Ngoni woman after marriage did not bear children, it was not considered a stigma on her, either individually or socially. The common practice of marrying one of her sisters as a 'substitute', or the very common practice of adoption was resorted to. The latter was always referred to as 'putting a child into the house of So and so'.

One of the alleged objects of initiation schools among other ethnic groups was to instruct the young initiates in correct

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

behaviour especially to elders, and to enforce by dramatic and sometimes brutal means a submissive attitude towards authority. That objective, as we have seen, was carried out by the Ngoni throughout their training of their children, from the earliest age upwards. They were half amused and half scandalized at the idea that young people had to be put in a camp in the bush in order to teach them how to behave.

Cultural changes in the assumption of adult roles

It is necessary to look back for a moment to the Ngoni past in order to see how changed external conditions in Nyasaland had altered the sequences and the timing of the process by which youths and young girls were recognized as adults. The stages of arriving at social maturity had been speeded up by cultural changes. In the days of warfare the senior herd-boys, from about twenty years of age, were called up at irregular intervals to form a new regiment. From this time they were known as 'young men' or 'youths', and they fought in the tribal wars for five years. In the off-season, during the rains when raids were not carried out, they were called to clear and cultivate the gardens of the Paramount and chiefs, and to help build houses and fence cattle kraals. At approximately the age of twenty-six to twenty-eight they were ordered to take the head-ring, the form of dressing the hair which formerly marked a married Ngoni man, and they were told they could marry and retire from the army. The older Ngoni declared that young men were not allowed to sleep with girls at all until they joined the army. Even then the relationship had to be initiated by the girl expressing her preference for a lover, and then sex relations were limited to partial intercourse. It was at marriage, after having been given the head-ring, that Ngoni youths were called 'men'. They moved out of the dormitory and built a hut for their wives in the area behind the huts belonging to their father's house. The cattle handed over on their marriage to the bride's family were taken from the herd belonging to that house.

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

new wife to replace the divorced woman. Divorce however seems to have been rare, and in the genealogies I collected I met with only one instance of divorce at this period.

3. *Payments and ceremonies*

Betrothal[10] was a preliminary to marriage but was not compulsory. A girl was betrothed only if she was sought in marriage before puberty and the marriage then did not take place until some years after puberty. If a girl passed puberty without being betrothed she was subsequently married without a betrothal period. A man was expected to make presents to the girl he had betrothed and he began to adopt avoidance relationships towards her parents. If after puberty the girl or her parents wished to break off the engagement they could do so but were then under an obligation to return the man's presents. The ceremony at which an aristocratic girl after puberty chose her own husband has been described by Wiese.[11]

In the marriage itself there are two main stages marked by two distinct transfers of cattle. The first transfer was called 'snuff-box', *m/uko*. The name of the payment is based on the practice of begging snuff from one's friends and acquaintances and indicates something trifling and not recoverable. It consisted of one beast. Payment of 'snuff-box' established the man's rights to bring an action against an adulterer but it did not give him the right to take his wife away to his own village nor to the custody of any children she might bear him. These rights were obtained only by the payment of bride-wealth, *malowolo*,[12] which consisted of from one to a dozen beasts depending on the status of the woman's father. Both payments, 'snuff-box' and bridewealth, were made by the man or, if he was a young man, by his father to his wife's father. No specifically defined relatives were obliged to help a man find his marriage cattle but a man with few cattle of his own looked for assistance to the head of his cluster. Similarly there were no definite rules of distribution of the marriage cattle among the woman's relatives and the matter

[10] The verb is *ku-komeka* for a man, and the passive *ku-komekwa* for a woman. Cf. Bemba *uku-kobeka* and *uku-kobekwa* in Richards, *Bemba Marriage and Present Economic Conditions* (Rhodes-Livingstone Papers, No. Four), p. 61.

[11] In his later paper he calls the ceremony *isyamusale*. In the earlier paper he calls the ceremony held at first menstruation *isikamusale* and says that after *this ceremony the girl went with others to choose the man she liked. The* vernacular words he mentions are presumably connected with the modern Nyanja *cinamwali*, which is now sometimes applied to three ceremonies held (1) at first menstruation, (2) six months later, *cinamwali cacinayo*, and (3) after first pregnancy, *cinamwali cacikulu*. The abstract noun *unamwali* is sometimes used in place of the concrete *cinamwali*. Cf. Wiese, op. cit., 'Expedição . . .', p. 473, and 'Geschichte . . .', p. 191; Rattray, op. cit. pp. 109 and 190; Stigand, 'Notes on the natives of Nyasaland, N.E. Rhodesia, and Portuguese Zambesia, their arts, customs and modes of subsistence', *JRAI*, xxxvii (1907), p. 121; Read, 'Tradition and prestige among the Ngoni', *Africa*, ix (1936), p. 472; Young and Banda, *Our African Way of Life*, pp. 22-4.

[12] Cf. the Zulu verb *uku-lobola*; also Rattray, op. cit. p. 190.

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

837 believes that her husband is committing adultery with If a women
another woman she endeavours to find out who the woman is. She
578 usually refuses to speak to her when they meet, and if they are forced to come into contact, as at a beer party, there is likely to be a fight between them. A parturient woman may ask her midwife to pretend that there are difficulties in labour so that her husband can be called upon to confess his adultery and name his mistress.

864 The sexual aspect of marriage influences the training and experiences of children. The explanation given for moving children from their parents' hut to a dormitory at the age of six or seven is that by then children are 'wise enough' and will talk to their playmates about their parents' sexual activities in the hut. Girls aged
[891] five years or so start to imitate the dances of their elders and to join in the dance competitions when girls come from other villages.
[533] Many of the songs sung at these dances are concerned with various aspects of sexual relations. At age ten, or sometimes earlier they
[535] also begin to practice the most important of the women's erotic dances, *cimwangalala*,[11] which is performed only indoors. At a
881 girl's first menstruation she is secluded for from a few days up to a
864 month, and is tested by women who have borne children to see that she can dance *cimwangalala* and other erotic dances effectively, that she knows the formalities of copulation, and how to behave when she menstruates. Even where the girl is secluded for the full month, and her training is accompanied by a great deal of symbolism and ceremonial, there is little reference to her potential fertility.

864 There is no formal instruction in sexual matters for boys, and there are no erotic dances for them. They learn their sexlore from their older companions in the bush or in the dormitory. The only
[831] specific aspect of sexual maturation that appears to receive emphasis is the growth of large testicles, and boys brew themselves medicines to expedite this.

842 Both fertility and sexual satisfaction can be facilitated by the use
830 of medicines. There is a well-known medicine for the cure of barrenness, and there are many kinds of aphrodisiacs.[12] A girl
[864] learns the use of aphrodisiacs from other women in the village, and she is formally taught sexual behaviour by her puberty instructress.[13]

881 The old woman who is in charge of her puberty seclusion, who is
593 sometimes the girl's grandmother, supervises the sexual behaviour of the girl for the first few years of her married life. If, as a bride, she succeeds in forcing her husband to give her a present before she will lie with him, the present must be handed over to the puberty instructress the next morning. Later she may demonstrate her
[535] erotic proficiency by dancing[14] in the hut before her husband and her instructress.

[11] Meaning, in Nsenga, 'the thing of you just sleeping' (i.e. copulating).
[12] Such as *mlololo*, a root, and *kajolojolo*, a plant.
[13] *Mphungu*.
[14] The dance is called *cikapa*. Cf. Nyanja *kapakapa*, swinging backwards and forwards.

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

take the "child," going with him to a hut to give him instruction, saying, "To-day you stand alone. Look after your people as did your father before you. If a man be at fault, forgive him; but the sin of adultery cannot be pardoned."

IV

THE UNAMWALI CEREMONY

I. When a young girl finds she has become a woman, she goes and stands beside the pathway [leading to the village]. Any one passing finds her there, standing silent. If it be a man who notices her, he goes off and tells some woman, saying to her, "I have come across game, go and lift it." An old woman goes off to speak to her. She finds the girl, her face enveloped in her calico, and giving no answer to any question put to her. Then the old woman knows the girl is now a matured woman, and takes her off to the stream to bathe her. On returning with her from the water she places her in the hut of the head old woman of the village. (The old woman who first found her is the head of the ensuing ceremony.) Then the old woman goes off to inform other elderly women that "the maiden has reached womanhood." The girl remains in the hut six days. Should she be of the clan of *Kuoni*, they give her porridge made from millet only, if of any other clan, porridge made of any grain. In her relish they do not put salt. Her porridge she eats out of an old basket, and the relish from a potsherd. (This old basket will be

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

thrown away the day she comes out of the *tsimba* hut.)

II. On the seventh day, before dawn, one of the old women rises and makes a shrill noise with her tongue, then old matrons only collect and go with the girl to the stream. Should the maiden formerly have been of an insolent nature, she is tied up in a bundle of grass and thrown into the water. The old women warm themselves over a fire on the bank. When the sun gets hot, she is taken out, and set on the bank, and they commence to dance and pull her about, and reprove her, saying, "You there, listen; I sent you to go and draw water for me, and you refused. You said, 'I am not a slave.' But could you have come to the water here to-day? She who has brought you here, is not she that very old creature?" Then she is given all sorts of advice. When they have finished they shave her head and pubes, and rub her with oil and adorn her with beads. Then the old woman who is head of the ceremony takes her up on her back, and as they go they sing—

"Wrinkles, mother, wrinkles,
I was at my own home, and never a wrinkle,
I came among the Angoni,
I saw wrinkles,
Wrinkles, O!
Things like this all fall on me.
Maiden cluck like an old sitting hen,
How can I cluck, I am only a young bird?
Cluck."

When they come with her to her mother's house, they sing—

"Tumbling about the things in her mother's hut.
In the hut that is no longer hers."

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

III. Then they spread a mat and go and bring her husband, and set them down on the mat side by side and begin to shave his head. As the hair falls the people throw down beads. Then they take a stick and lay it across the legs of the man and woman so that each may know it is that stick that will beat them [if they do wrong]. When they have finished shaving the man, they bring oil and rub the bodies of the man and woman. When it is dark the old women escort the girl to her husband's hut. The *ndiwo* relish is cooking on the fire. During the night the woman rises and puts some salt in the pot. Next morning, before dawn, before the villagers have opened their doors, the woman goes off, and gives some of the relish to her mother, and to the old woman who was mistress of the ceremony. This relish she just sets down at the door, and when they open they find it, and rub it on their feet and under their arm-pits; little children just eat it. If she have any relations who are at a distance, they sharpen a little piece of bamboo and stick the relish on the end (and put it aside) that the distant one, when he returns, shall also rub his feet with it. Perhaps the absent one, should he not have heard that these events have happened when he comes to the village, and should say, "Give me water that I may drink," they refuse him, but with a purpose, even though the water is there, and go and bring the relish that first he may rub some on his feet. It may be the woman *discovers that her husband is impotent, then* she just stays in her hut and does not come forth to distribute the relish. Then the old women [who know the reason] will persuade the man, saying, "Go off to the man with the lots to consult them" [to see what is to be done]. When he goes off (on this errand) some other man is called in, and he

6:Rattray E,G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

881 585 [837]

will finish the ceremony [that the relish may be given out]. Should the girl, before she came to maturity, not have been betrothed to any man, the matrons tell her she must go to some lover; this is known as "chigango." In the evening she takes her cooking pot and relish and goes to the quarters of the young unmarried men, who for the night sleep somewhere else. In the morning the girl goes back to the *Kuka* hut.

V

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

843 593

I. When a woman becomes pregnant, the matrons of the village tell the husband "he must now no longer cohabit with her." If the man have another wife he goes off to her house. When the time draws near for the woman's accouchement, she bids her husband leave her. He goes to one of the village matrons and tells her, "My wife is very ill." Then old women go to the hut and begin to take out all the cooking utensils and household goods. Should the woman have difficulty in giving birth the old women bid her confess, saying, "*Speak, child, lest you die; who committed adultery* with you?" Should she have been faithless she confesses, saying, "I sinned with so and so." The matrons hide such confessions. When she is safely delivered they bathe the infant, then one old woman goes off to tell the husband, "Your wife is well." Perhaps the woman has given birth to a male child, then she tells him, "You have seen a knobkerry."

844 [845]

9: Read E-5 (1935) 1936 FR5 Ngoni FR5
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this they put the blame on the women. They point out that while they were on the march the local women they picked up, with their different language and customs, had not a great deal of influence on the community. Once they were settled, however, and married local women, those women went visiting to their own homes and took their children with them, and gradually a pronounced alien element and another language penetrated into Ngoni society. This is illustrated very well in the girls' initiation ceremonies, which differ very much in Ngoni and Chewa society. Ngoni men and women tell you with disgust how the *chinamwali*, the Chewa ceremony, began to be practised in Ngoni villages in place of the *umsindo* or *umgonxo* of the Ngoni. It was the only occasion on which I have heard them commend the action of the missionaries in putting down a custom, for they really despised the ceremonial and associations of the *chinamwali*, and rather than have it among them, they preferred outside help in putting it down.

The Ngoni dislike very much being asked point blank what cultural adjustments they made due to Chewa and other local customs. They admit reluctantly one or two minor adaptations, and proceed immediately to tell the major changes which they forced on the Chewa and others living under their rule. The chief adjustment by the Ngoni has undoubtedly been the adoption of the local language, as being the language of the women. Ngoni women of good family still speak Ngoni, but I have not found any instances of local women married to Ngoni men who have learned it. One of the perennial topics among the elders in an Ngoni village is the 'bad' influence of the women on the children. When pressed to explain the nature of this 'bad' influence, they say, 'The children are learning only the customs of the women. They cannot know about the Ngoni'. They lament the vanishing of the age-grades as the natural channels for instruction of young men in Ngoni customs, though they say with their characteristic realism, 'What is the good of having age grades and regiments when there is no war?'

If we were to attempt to reconstruct old Ngoni society as it was in the days before white contact, it is to this period, *chamtendere*, we should turn. There we can find the structure of Ngoni society, the distinctive Ngoni institutions, and Ngoni supremacy over the surrounding tribes as a reality. When the first white people arrived, as